

SAFETY AND SECURITY AS THE BASIC DETERMINANTS OF QUALITY OF HOTEL SERVICES

EWA WSZENDYBYŁ-SKULSKA,¹ MAREK ZAWARTKA²

Jagiellonian University, Kraków, POLAND

¹ e-mail: e.wszendybyl-skulska@uj.edu.pl

² e-mail: marek.zawartka@uj.edu.pl

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ABSTRACT

The ultimate goal of any hotel is to care about the quality of services. One of the key dimensions is to provide customers/guests with a sense of security. So far, the issue of security in the hotel industry has been the subject of few studies both in Poland and abroad which explains the reason why the problems have been talked over especially in the face of growing threats. The aim of the study is to present the selected security dimensions and threats experienced by hotel facilities and to present ways to improve processes of safety assurance in order to ensure the highest quality of hotel services. The conducted research based on the analysis of two aspects of security (crime and compliance with fire regulations) in hotel facilities allowed to identify major threats affecting a decrease in the level of guest/customer safety in Polish hotels and then to point out actions to be taken in order to reach an adequate and compliant with the requirements level of hotel service quality.

The research was conducted using critical analysis of the literature on the subject, legislation and internal documents of hotels nationwide and worldwide as well as methods of data analysis of the Police Headquarters and the Headquarters of the State Fire Services and in-depth interviews.

The results of the conducted analyzes allowed to indicate different ways to improve safety in hotel facilities where system solutions and involvement of many entities for shaping a quality hotel product of the region are required.

Introduction

Massively increasing demand for hospitality services causes more and more objects providing such services are being created. They must compete with each other and fight for the hospitality market becoming at the same time the driving force of economies. Undoubtedly, in this struggle hotels need to know the factors that may help support their competition with other market participants in order to obtain a sustainable competitive advantage.

Such a fundamental factor for competitiveness and success is quality (Rapacz, 2007) and essentially its continuous improvement.

One of the most important aspects of quality of hotel services is safety. It is also considered as one of the five forces along with technology, marketing, human resources, assets and capital that have a major global impact on the industry. However, only after the bombing attacks at the hotels in the Indian Mumbai, Marriott and Ritz-Carlton in Jakarta, Mumbai or terrorist attacks in Egypt, Iraq, the United States, the SARS epidemic, a tsunami, the need to ensure safety and security has become everyone's priority

The basis for assessing compliance with minimum quality standards became the accepted legal rules at hotels, activity of which is based on meeting technical requirements and maintaining safety and consumer protection. While accepting certain standards of hygiene of the offered services, fire regulations or gastronomy is a necessity imposed by the law, certain areas unregulated by the law where the level of the given services is dependent somewhat on the management goodwill still remains.

The aim of the study is to present the selected security dimensions and threats in hotel facilities as well as to present ways to improve safety assurance in order to ensure the highest level of hotel services. The authors of the work pointed to the dimensions of security (safety and security) in hotels both in macro and micro scale. However, particular attention was paid to its two dimensions at the micro level: fire protection (resulting from the provisions of law) and related to crimes committed within the area of hotels.

The concept of quality of hotel services and its dimensions

In today's world quality of hotel services is not just a fashion. It has become a standard. Increasingly, quality becomes the exclusive element influencing consumer choice.

Considering the fact that quality is by nature a relative category which does not exist in itself, it should be considered in conjunction with the objective of its provision. The main objective of hotel services is to meet the needs of visitors with regard to their stay at a certain hotel. Thus, one can say that one of the leading principles of hotel industry is hospitality understood as provision of comfort, standard, level of service, safety and security, a good atmosphere during a stay at the hotel and high professional and ethical and moral level of the staff (Witkowski, 2002).

At the same time when considering the above, it is clear that failure to provide safety and security has an impact on failing to provide the remaining elements, i.e.: comfort, standard, atmosphere, etc. Unless the hotel provides one of the basic needs of every human being (security), there is no possibility to satisfy the higher needs, i.e.: the need for respect or acknowledgement that is clearly expected by hotel guests (Borkowski, Wszendybył, 2007).

Thus, assurance (among others: safety and security), along with tangibility, reliability, responsiveness and empathy, is one of the key dimensions of hotel service quality, which is considered by numerous researchers (Parasuraman, Zeithaml, Berry, 1985; Borkowski, Wszendybył, 2007; Panasiuk, 2007).

Although most authors define quality as a primary demand of a customer that must be met, the key issue is the need to consider and reconcile the interests of guests and the hotel itself. Both of these groups of stakeholders have indeed different requirements. However, the importance of the safety aspect (one of primary dimensions of quality of hotel services) for both parties seem to be a priority (Chan, Lam, 2013).

Essence of safety and security in hotels

Providing hotel security is not a simple and easy process. Specificity of hotel industry makes each participant of the hotel market understand the aspect of safety and security differently (Jedlińska, 2008). In addition, it is multidimensional. The concept of security in hospitality operations has many times been addressed in tandem with that of safety, even though the general thrust of each term is somewhat different.

Today, the concept of safety applies to disasters, fire protection, conditions which guarantee freedom from injury and damage to property. In contrast, security is a concept used to determine the need for freedom from anxiety, fear as well as protection and defense against stealing guests'/customers', employees', companies' possessions and theft from customers/ guests and employees.

Although the two concepts of safety and security are often used interchangeably, they describe, however, two different phenomena as it is pointed out by Enz and Masaco (2002) who claim that safety involves protecting employees and customers within the hotel property from a potential injury or death, while hotel security deals with preserving guests' possessions and hotel property. There is a close relation between these two concepts: weakening of security increases the risk of reduction of safety. As a result, safety and security are directly proportional, but both are inversely proportional to the risks.

Safety and security value may be difficult to measure and quantify (Walsh, 2015). Therefore, the importance of hotel safety and security should not be underestimated at the design stage of a facility and services it offers before "something" happens.

Hotel safety and security are complex issues as much as how complex a hotel product is. Safety and security are the functions of a building construction and adopted architectural solutions, security system and monitoring. They are also a result of the procedures and operations performed by the staff equipped with appropriate knowledge and skills.

The presented issue of ensuring safety and security in the hotel industry shows a broad field of threats that objects, their guests/customers, employees and partners are facing. The following part of the work is focused on two dimensions of micro safety, that is: fire safety, and the one associated with crime committed in hotels. It is due to the fact that those are the most common problems faced by hotel managers on a daily basis.

Fire safety in hotel facilities

Hotels are classified as objects vulnerable to fire, so there is a constant tendency to tighten rigor in the obedience to all formal and legal regulations in this regard.

According to current regulations, there is an obligation to install fire detection systems in hotels, whose mission is to detect the risk of fire as soon as possible, to ensure safety of persons residing in these facilities, and in particular to allow rapid evacuation. It is also advisable to install these devices in hotels that are not subject to the above rules.

The data presented in the two tables below shows in what extent the systems are used and fire protection regulations respected by hoteliers in Poland.

Table 1. Results of monitoring of compliance with fire safety regulations in Poland between 2009 and 2016

	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Objects checked	1,531	1,492	1,804	2,012	1,462	1,598	1,783	2,012
Objects with identified irregularities in total	856	794	1,044	908	585	631	710	749
Irregularities in total	3,980	3,283	4,739	3,845	2,474	2,496	2,725	2,509
Fires	109	85	123	112	120	132	151	140

Source: Headquarters of the State Fire Service of Poland.

The data presented in the table above shows that between 2009 and 2016 irregularities were found in every second hotel facility controlled by fire services (approx. 2 per each object). They referred mainly to evacuation, poor condition or incorrect use of utility installations, water supply and fire protection ones as well as lack or poor legibility of fire safety instructions. Positive aspects are a decrease in the number of hotel facilities in which irregularities occurred (from 57.8% in 2011 to 37.2% in 2016) and a decrease in the total number of irregularities within the objects (from 4739 in 2011 to 2509 in 2016). Nonetheless, the number of found irregularities is still large. Equally, the data showing the number of fires in hotels triggered by faulty installations is alarming.

The number of objects where irregularities were found as well as the number of irregularities alone have been decreasing and so has, since 2012, the number of decisions by the Fire Service on the removal of irregularities. There was also a slight increase in building acceptance testing by fire services although surprisingly 30% of all objects received a negative decision. It may be the evidence of stringent inspections by the Fire Brigade or lack of knowledge on the threats that may arise from non-compliance of regulations (Headquarters of the State Fire Service of Poland).

Fire safety depends mainly on compliance with requirements and regulations. However, it is also dependent on managers' awareness and knowledge in this field. Therefore, unless hoteliers are going to comply with fire regulations and realize how meaningful these are for proper functioning of hotel facilities, it probably will be difficult to convince them to introduce other procedures, staff training in negotiation techniques, observation of the environment and to draw appropriate conclusions. The problem can be seen by analyzing another safety aspect related to crimes committed within the hotel premises.

Crimes committed in hotel premises

A hotel's "everyday crime" does not mean terrorists, but theft and burglary instead. According to the residual statistics, the number of such crimes in hotels usually increases during recession. Statistics are rudimentary and incomplete since hotels are trying hard to care about their image and good name, and many of them do not report crimes to the police. Some hotels, according to their capabilities and skills to protect themselves are trying to detect the perpetrators, and if they succeed, they adverse consequences to the guilty. When the culprit turns out to be an employee, he or she is usually dismissed, and when it comes to hotel guests, they are banned from entering the hotel. A hotel located in a large city experiences at least one offense per day. Most often it is theft.

In Poland theft and burglary account for 90% of hotel crimes recorded in police statistics (Table 2).

Table 2. Number of offenses committed (recorded) in the area of hotel facilities in Poland between 2009 and 2016

Year	Assassination	Injury	Fight or assaults	Rape	Theft	Burglary	Extortion crimes
2016	5	56	25	11	952	299	9
2015	1	48	23	12	928	287	23
2014	1	43	23	12	1,047	264	16
2013	1	51	31	5	1,108	252	24
2012	1	44	26	14	1,041	228	14
2011	3	36	34	15	1,010	282	29
2010	2	36	31	15	1,152	384	32
2009	2	47	54	12	1,149	444	25

Source: Police Headquarters of Poland.

According to the table, minor offenses, i.e. : theft and larceny of not very high values are the biggest problem. The greatest detriment for both guests and hotels is an invasion of privacy and loss of trust.

Analyzing the data presented in the above table, one can see a very positive trend, i.e. over 20% decrease in the number of crimes committed on a hotel territory in Poland in 2016 (1,357) compared with 2009 (1,733). Were it not for the fact that, as it has already been indicated, hoteliers in order to care for the image and reputation of their facilities, relatively rarely report on crimes committed within their properties to the police.

Improvement actions in the field of safety and security in hotels to ensure a higher level of quality of hotel services

Given the above considerations, it is clear that there is no chance to offer a quality service unless one of the basic needs, i.e. safety and security, is met. It is therefore essential to take up improvement activities that not only help hoteliers provide an adequate level of safety and security in accordance with the requirements (both customers and various institutions) but also boost service quality and its continuous improvement.

Taking the specifics of the hotel industry into account and facing the necessity of making a variety of decisions by employees, often without possibility of consulting the manager, it is worth protecting any possible areas of a hotel facility, preparing appropriate procedures and implementing a program to help employees' daily responsibilities in order to provide the highest level of services. However, to make it happen, it is necessary to educate owners and managers of hotel facilities on proper understanding of the concepts of safety and security and their importance in proper shaping of quality of services offered and thereby functioning of a hotel. Security is the part of hotel operation which is usually least invested in assuming that such investments do not translate into a financial result. It is a big mistake as the inclusion of certain security solutions at the design stage of the building often saves expenses during an operation.

It means that already at the design stage of the building and its construction or adaptation, cooperation between designers, conservators, owners, managers with the institutions supervising compliance with the provisions for safety insurance is fundamental. This cooperation may take place in various forms, including the one based on the creation of joint advisory or initiative teams (Szymańska, 2017), or initiatives related to hotel certification in terms of security. The "Safety Certificate-Safe Karpacz" program, which is an initiative of a number of entities, whose aim is to motivate owners and users of facilities to take greater care of their clients' safety, as well

as to free up initiatives and creativity in the process of improving safety on the premises, is worth mentioning as an example of such cooperation (*Certyfikaty bezpieczeństwa...*, 2018). The Police, representatives of government and self – government administration and social partners interested in improving public safety and order are involved in the program.

In this regard, a big role should be also played by government institutions and economic administration by organizing training sessions and meetings aimed at increasing hoteliers' knowledge and awareness on safety and the impact of the aspect not only on quality and efficiency of a single object but also on the entire branch of industry in the region.

All employees of a hotel facility should also be subject to trainings, no matter a department they work at bell boys, to front desk staff, to housekeepers to others, they are responsible for creation of culture of safety and professionalism in order to keep everybody safe and secure.

It is definitely easier for net hotels to realize the assumption as they have centralized services responsible for security that monitor the security system and conditions in all facilities that belong to the network, have defined specific procedures and standards compliance with which is required by their employees. Managers of independent objects experience even more serious difficulties. Nonetheless, it is them who should pay special attention to development of cooperation between hotels and mobilize local governments to it in order to reach common solutions for training and counselling in the field of hotel securing.

In addition, it is worth educating guests. It is due to cultural differences of guests/customers and employees of hotel facilities that result in different approaches to security issues.

Therefore, there is a justified need to develop a large-scale cooperation between hoteliers as well as between hoteliers and the local government, fire services, police and media that aim at a common concern for safety and security in hotels which are essential for shaping quality of a hotel product.

Conclusions

Providing safety and security means more than peace, not only in the form of hotelier's and guests' safety, but also easier hotel management, improvement of employees' efficiency, finding and eliminating inefficiencies in the operation of the object (Arbelo-Pérez, Arbelo, Pérez-Gómez, 2017).

A safety level depends mainly on compliance with the requirements and regulations of hotel facilities as well as on managers' and employees' awareness and knowledge in the field.

Managers of hotel facilities should build long-term trust of their customers and improve quality services by providing them with a sense of security in many areas (not only those required by the law).

The issue of safety and security in hotels is broad and refers to more and more aspects. There are new threats hotels will face and learn in the near future. The problem of safety and security in hotels is complex as it must be seen in a wider context of cause-and-effect relationship, noting the elimination of complex factors. The issue of ensuring safety and security is not of responsibility of hoteliers only. It requires systemic solutions and involvement of many actors in order to shape a quality hotel product in the region.

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